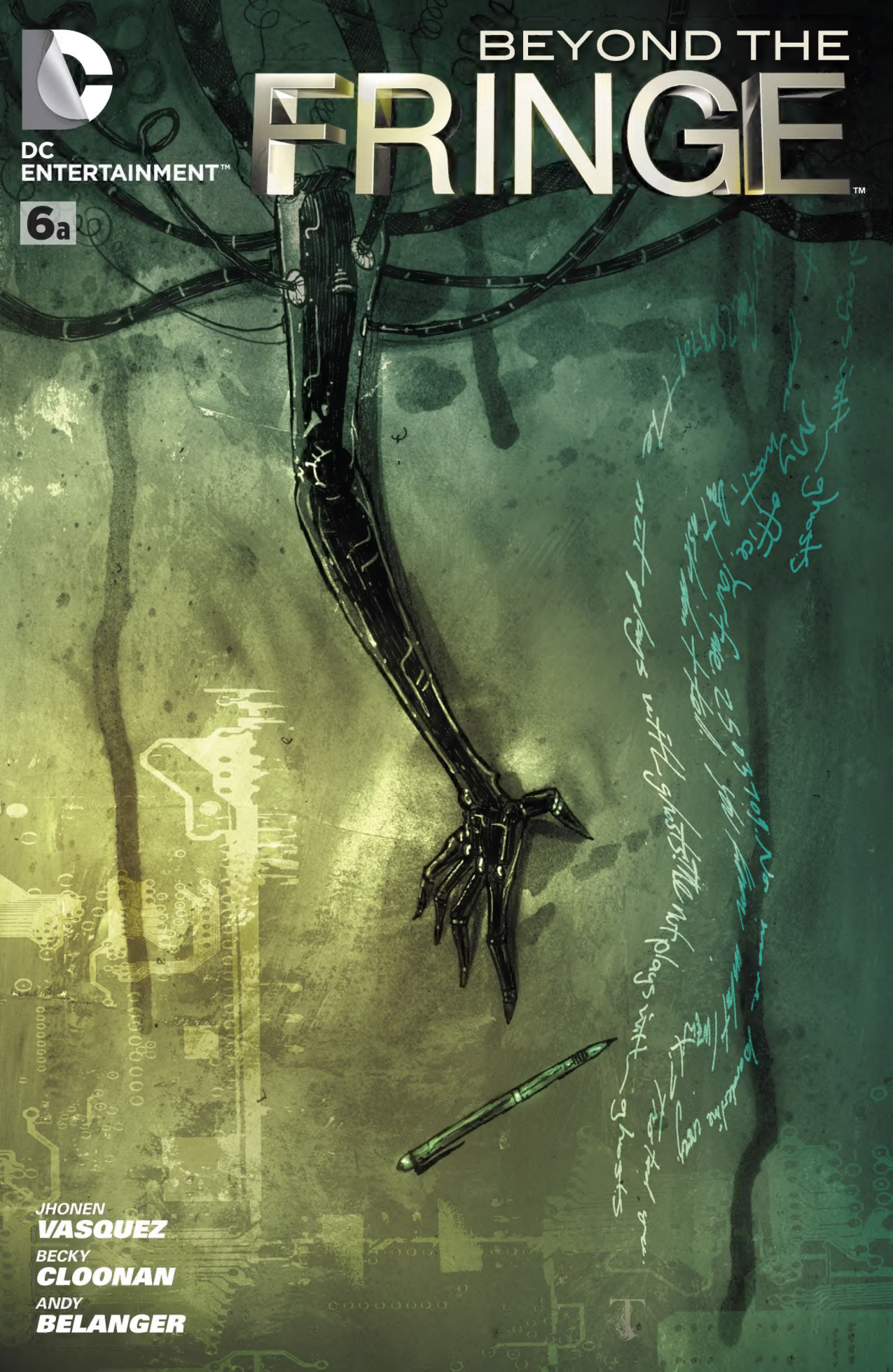
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BEYOND THE FRINGE™
6a
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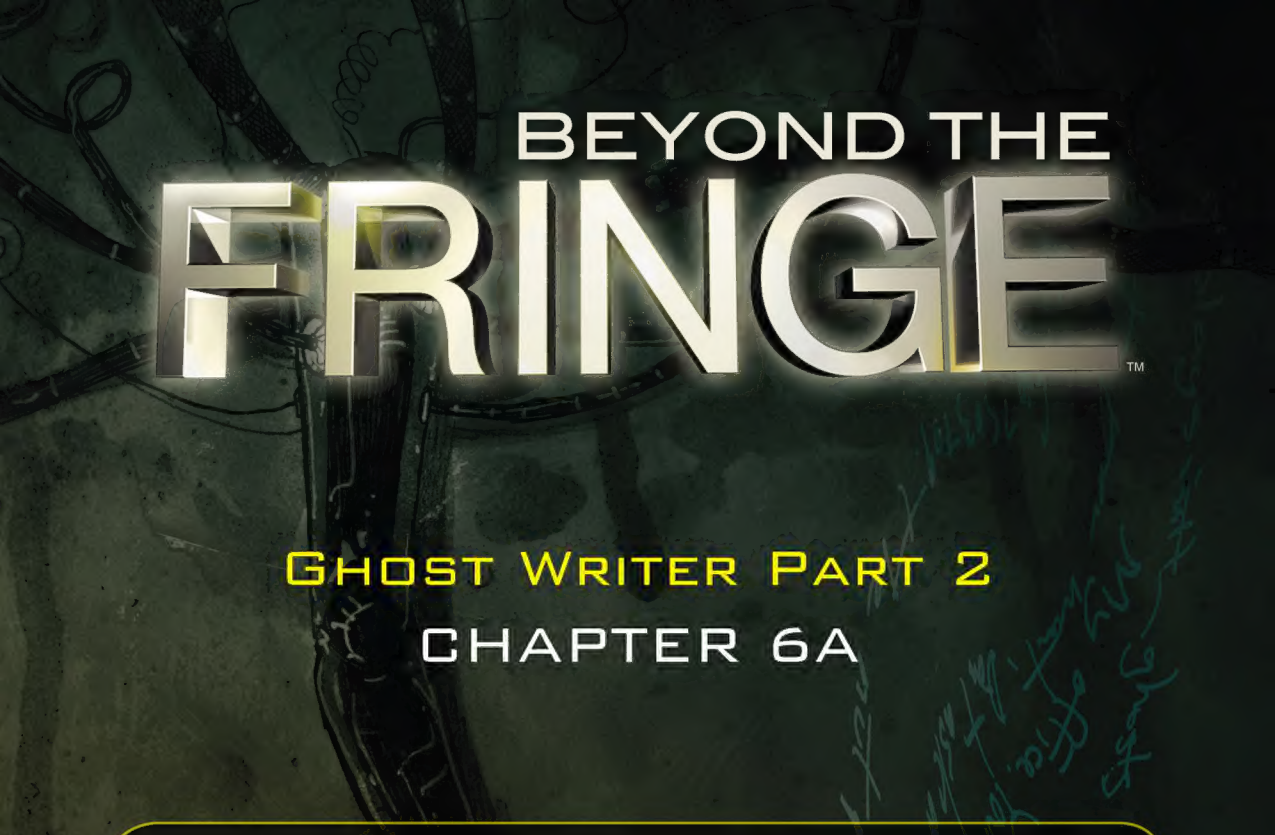

Ghost Writer Part 2
Chapter 6A

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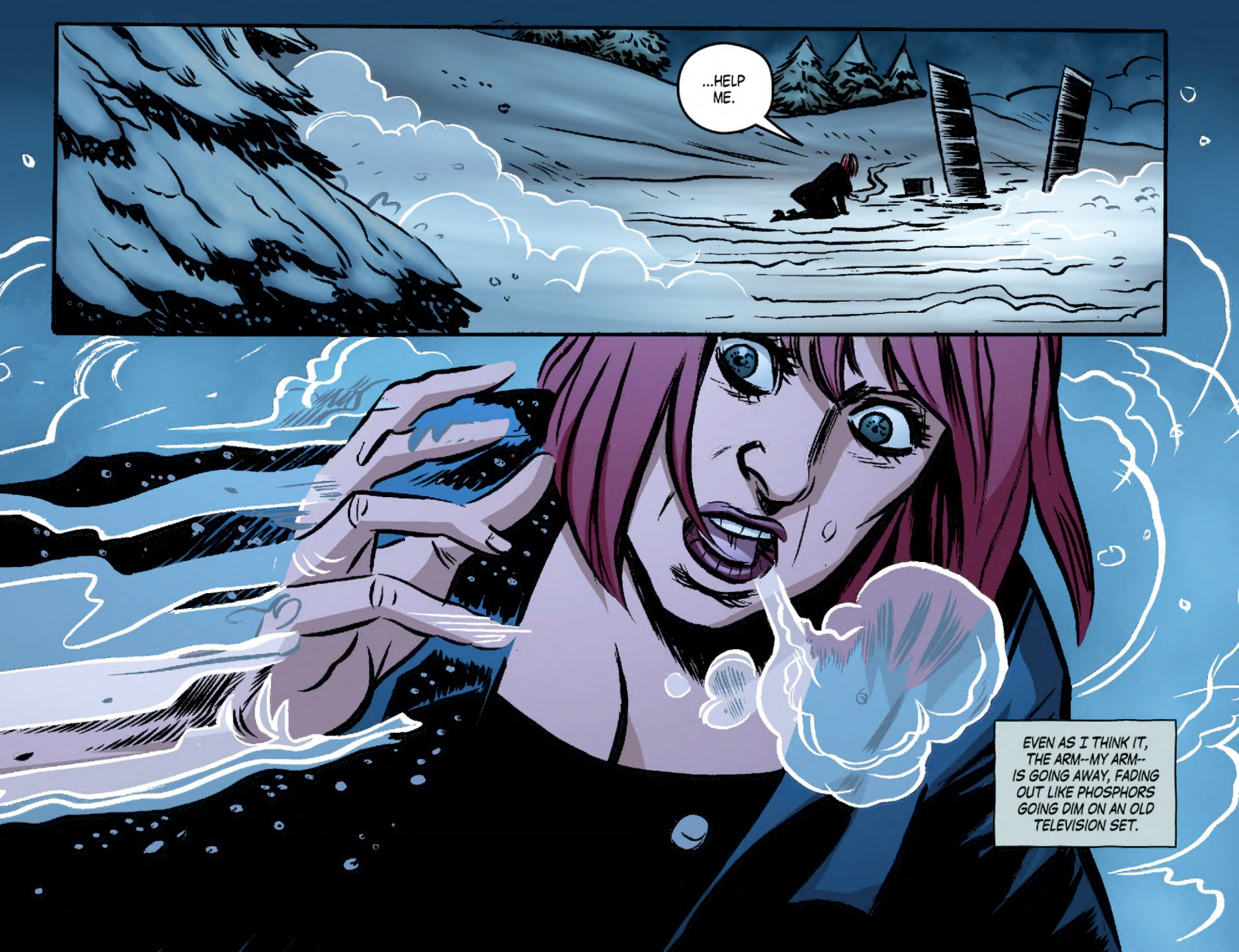
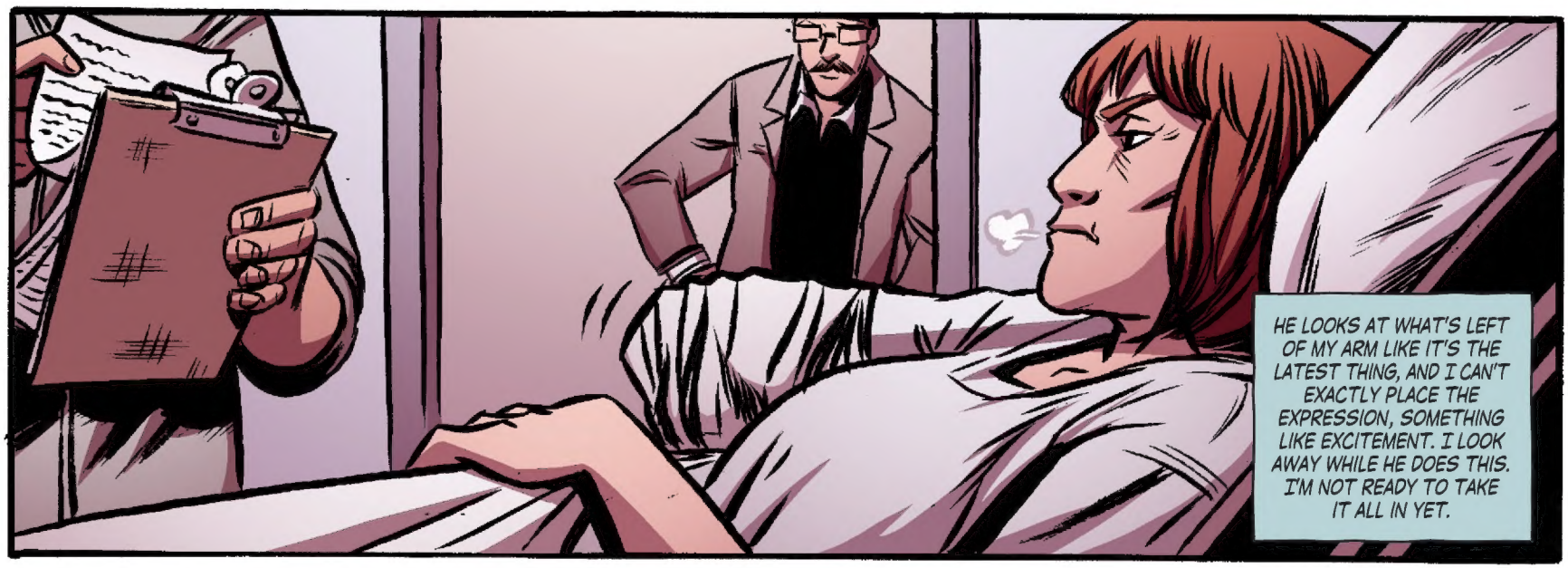
REIDEN LAKE
I'M WONDERING WHY I HAVEN'T PASSED OUT YET, AND THEN I THINK, "WHY WOULD I? IT ISN'T BLEEDING."


...HELP ME.
EVEN AS I THINK IT, THE ARM--MY ARM-- IS GOING AWAY, FADING OUT LIKE PHOSPHORS GOING DIM ON AN OLD TELEVISION SET.

I WANTED TO BRING YOU A CARD, BUT I WASN'T SURE WHAT KIND WAS APPROPRIATE FOR SOMETHING LIKE THIS.
"SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS," MAYBE.
I ACTUALLY LAUGH. I NEVER CRY OVER THIS. WHAT'S THE POINT? INTER-DIMENSIONAL ACCIDENTS HAPPEN.


HE LOOKS AT WHAT'S LEFT OF MY ARM LIKE IT'S THE LATEST THING, AND I CAN'T EXACTLY PLACE THE EXPRESSION, SOMETHING LIKE EXCITEMENT. I LOOK AWAY WHILE HE DOES THIS. I'M NOT READY TO TAKE IT ALL IN YET.

I USED TO MARVEL AT SOME OF THE PICTURES OF CIVIL WAR-ERA AMPUTEES AND THE HARDWARE THEY USED. CAN YOU BELIEVE HOW FAR WE'VE COME SINCE THEN?
I DON'T SAY SO, BUT I CAN BELIEVE IT.

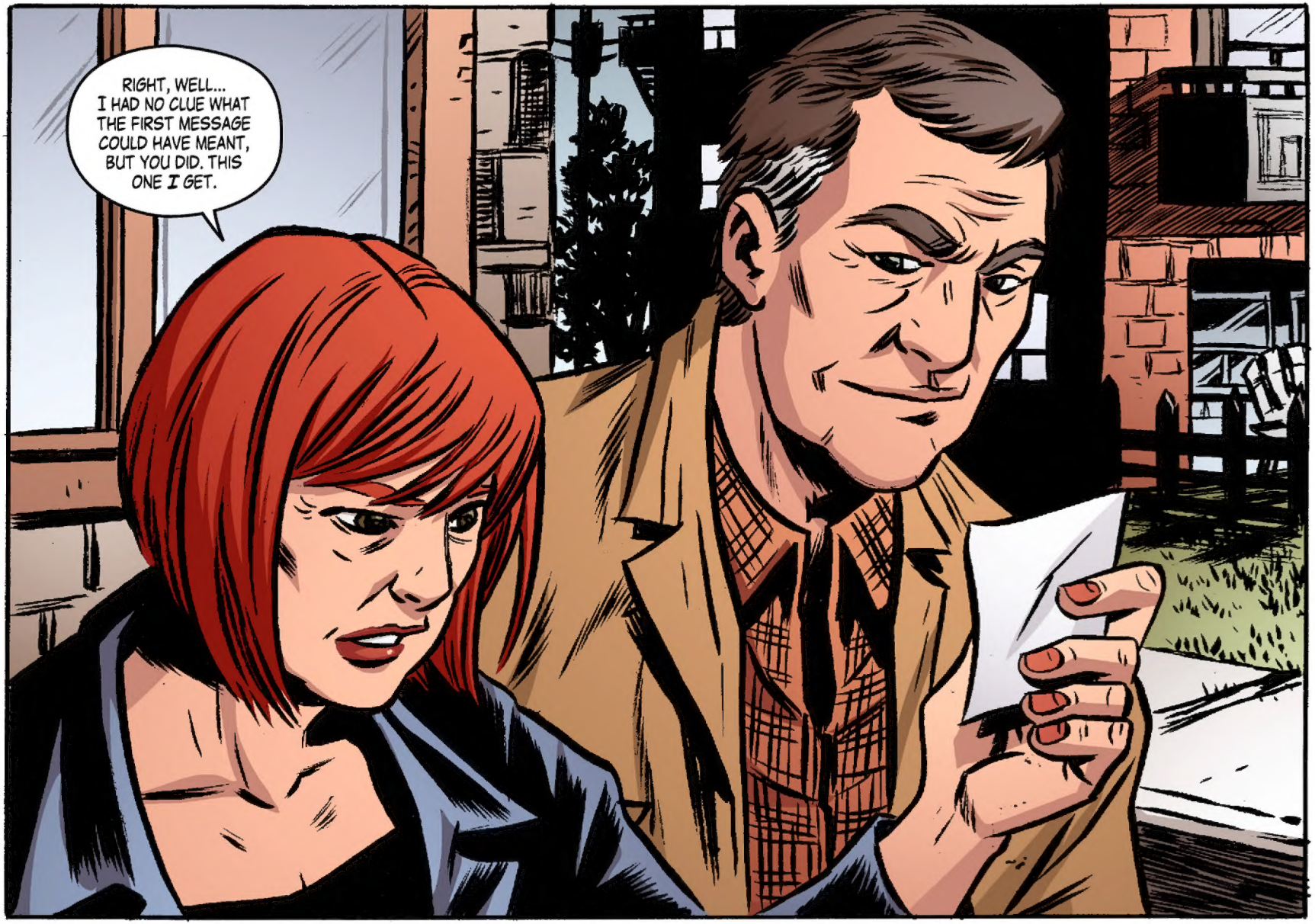
WILLIAM COMES INTO MY OFFICE. TWO YEARS HAVE PASSED AND THOUGH I HATE IT, I'M USED TO THE CLUMSY THING I WEAR AS AN ARM.
I HAVE SOMETHING YOU MIGHT FIND INTERESTING. TAKE A BREAK?

I'M REMEMBERING NOW HOW WILLIAM WOULD VANISH, FOR LONG STRETCHES, NOT WORKING ANYWHERE WHERE HE COULD BE FOUND. THE CRYPTIC THINGS HE'D SAY, THE MYSTERIOUS SMILES...
WILLIAM...
EXCUSE THE LOOK. IT'S MORE OF A PROTOTYPE, BUT STILL QUITE FUNCTIONAL. I'LL UNDERSTAND IF YOU WANT TO KEEP USING THE ONE YOU HAVE.
MY NEW ARM'S FIRST OFFICIAL ACT IS THROWING AWAY THE OLD ARM, AND IT FEELS WONDERFUL.

SO WONDERFUL THAT I DO IT SEVERAL TIMES.
I'LL LEAVE YOU TO IT THEN.

LET'S ASSUME FOR NOW THAT YOUR DREAM WAS NOTHING MORE THAN SOMETHING BROUGHT ON BY ALL THIS TALK OF WILLIAM AND YOUR ARM.
MY ARM WRITING ANOTHER MESSAGE ISN'T A DREAM, THOUGH.

MY OFFICE. YOUR FACE. 2503709
NO. THIS IS DEFINITELY REAL ENOUGH.
IT'S VAGUELY THREATENING SOUNDING, THIS ONE, EH? "MY OFFICE. YOUR FACE." THREATENING, OR POSSIBLY PERVERTED.
WALTER, ASSUMING WILLIAM IS SENDING THESE MESSAGES--
ER, WRONG TENSE, I THINK. IT'S MORE LIKELY HE ISN'T SENDING SO MUCH AS ALREADY SENT, AND POSSIBLY UP TO A DECADE AGO. REMEMBER, WE'RE DEALING WITH WHAT ARE ESSENTIALLY ECHOES OF THOUGHTS BOUNCING AROUND US.


RIGHT, WELL... I HAD NO CLUE WHAT THE FIRST MESSAGE COULD HAVE MEANT, BUT YOU DID. THIS ONE I GET.

SO, BELLY'S OFFICE. THIS IS VERY EXCITING! TELL ME, WHAT IS THIS ABOUT YOUR FACE?
NOT MY FACE, WALTER. ANY FACE. THE MIRROR ON THE WALL THERE. THE ONE COVERING THE SAFE.
WILLIAM NEVER EVEN KEPT ANYTHING IN THIS, NOTHING OF IMPORTANCE. HE JUST LIKED HAVING IT. THOUGHT IT WAS NEAT. AND THE KEYCODE WASN'T EVEN SOMETHING HE HID.
IT'S NOT WORKING. I ENTERED THE NUMBERS JUST AS THEY ARE ON THE PAPER BUT--
BUT THAT'S NOT THE KEYCODE.
MY OFFICE. YOUR FACE.

0-5-2-0-1-0. THAT'S HOW YOU OPEN IT. HE USED IT FOR EVERYTHING. SO WHAT'S THIS CODE MY ARM WROTE?

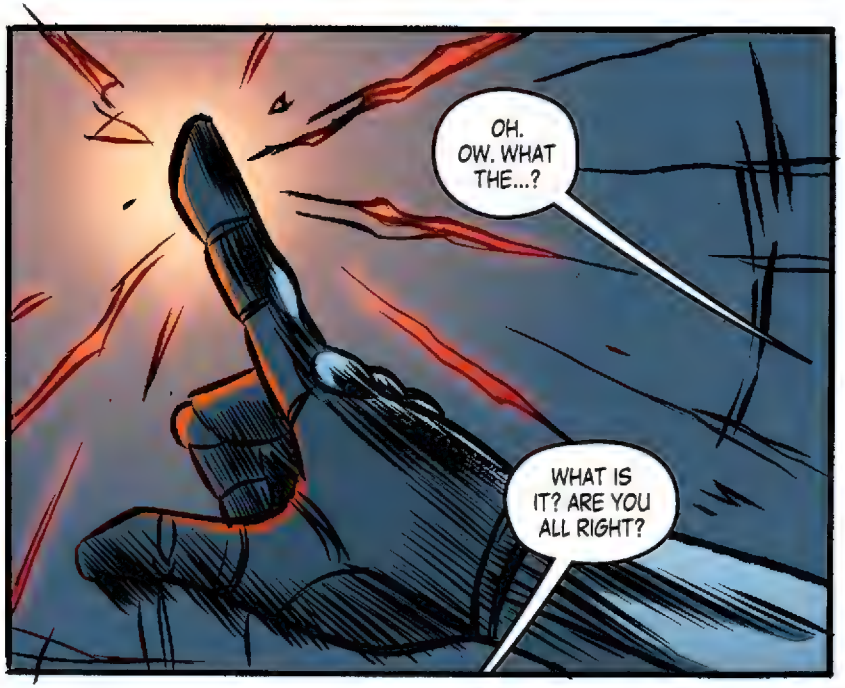
MAYBE THE SECOND KEYPAD...IS FOR AN OPEN SAFE?

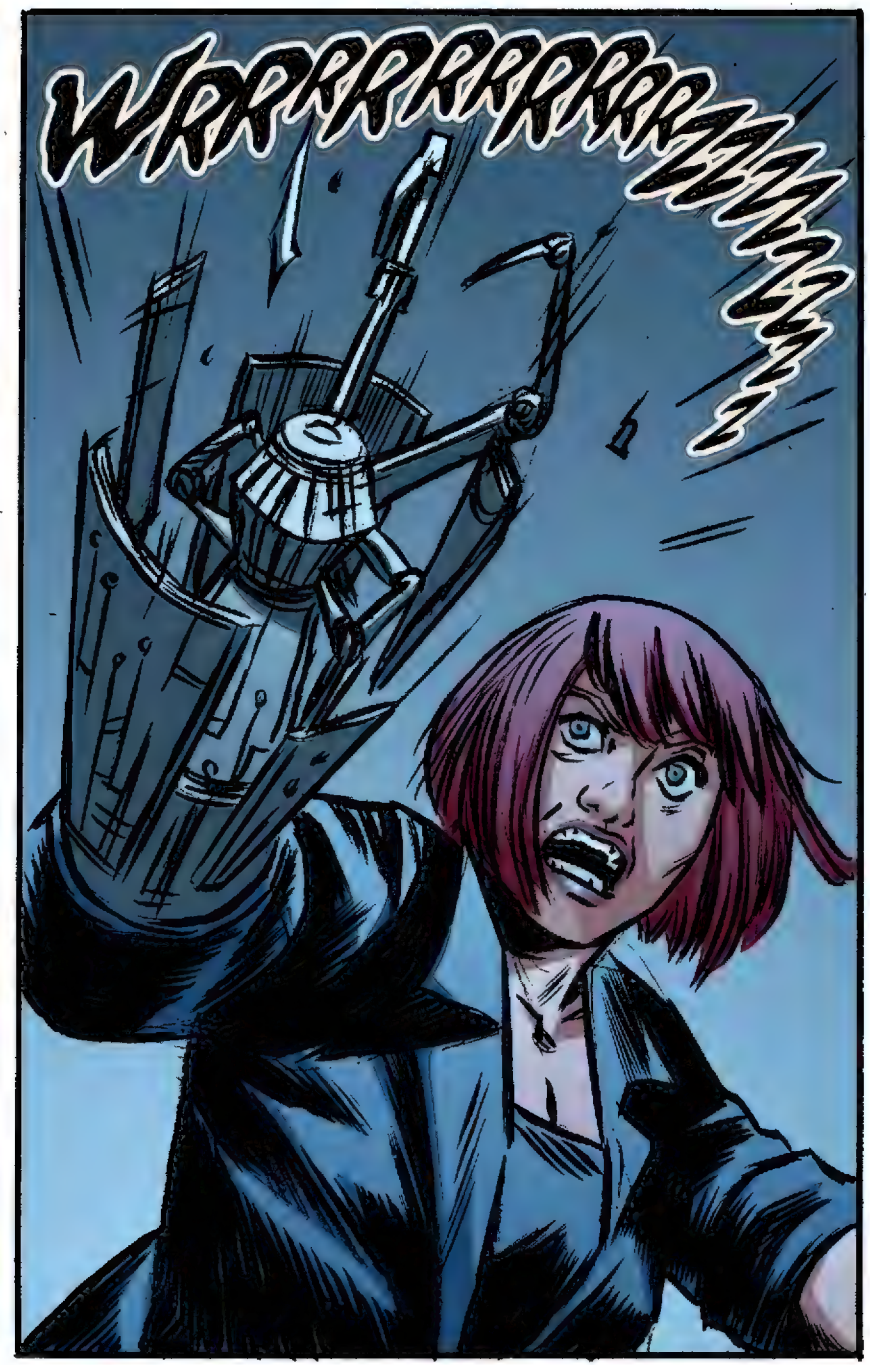
2-5-0-3-7-0-9
BEEP
BEEP
OH, GOOD. THIS MUST BE WHERE WILLIAM HID HIS BEEPS.
RING
RING
RING

A FIRE ALARM JUST WENT OFF IN ONE OF THE STORAGE ROOMS. WILLIAM'S PERSONAL STORAGE ROOM. NO FIRE, BUT A BOOKCASE "SUNK INTO THE FLOOR."
HOW WONDERFULLY THEATRICAL!
MOST PEOPLE GO TO THE ROOF TO THINK. WILLIAM BUILDS A SECRET LAIR.

THIS APPEARS TO BE SOME SORT OF MECHANICAL SEAL, BUT I DON'T THINK I'VE SEEN ANY KEYS LIKE THIS ON THE SECURITY GUARDS' KEYRINGS.

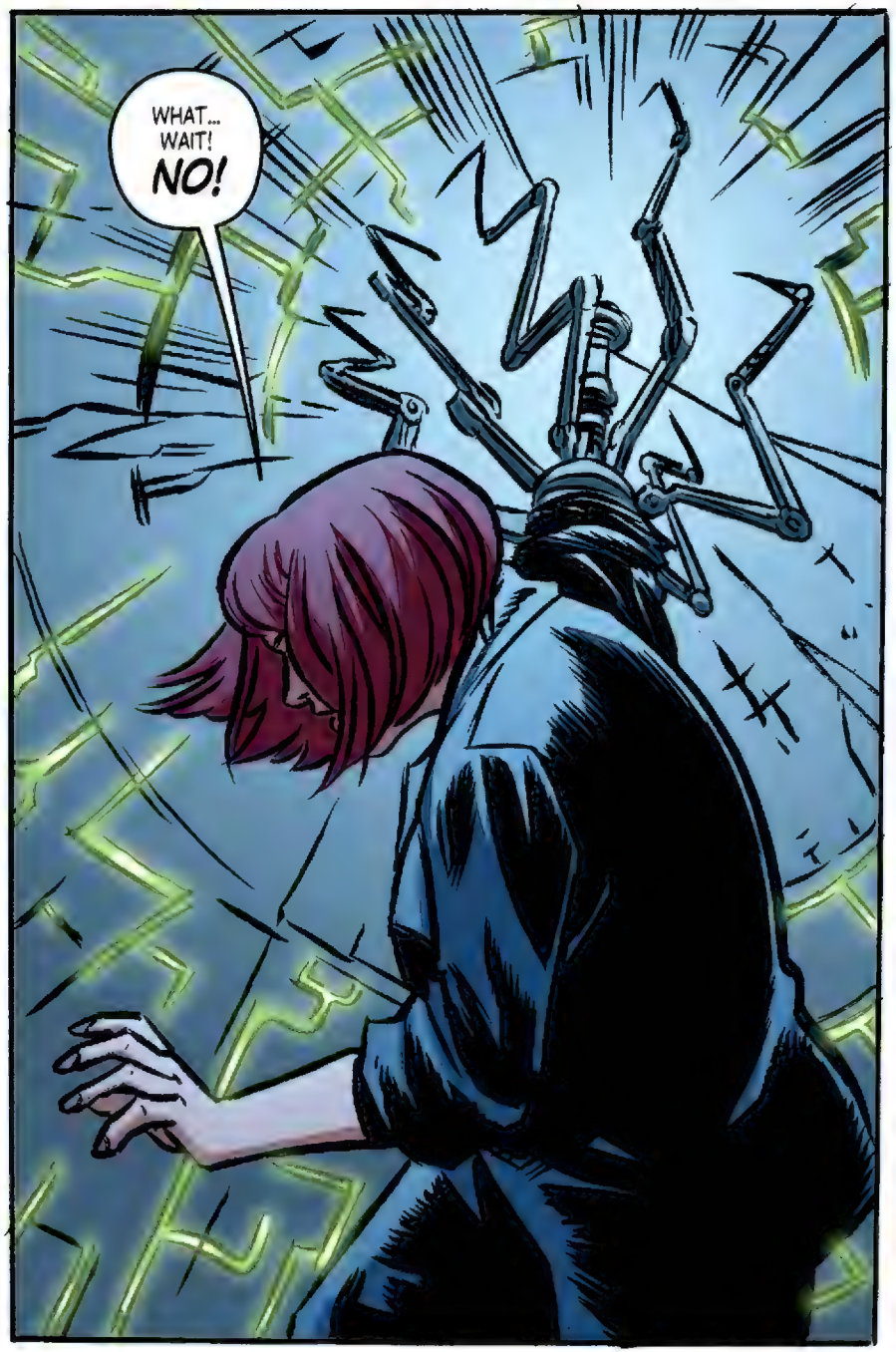
WELL, IF WORSE COMES TO WORST, WE COULD HAVE A TEAM COME IN TO BORE THROUGH, ASSUMING--
TAP

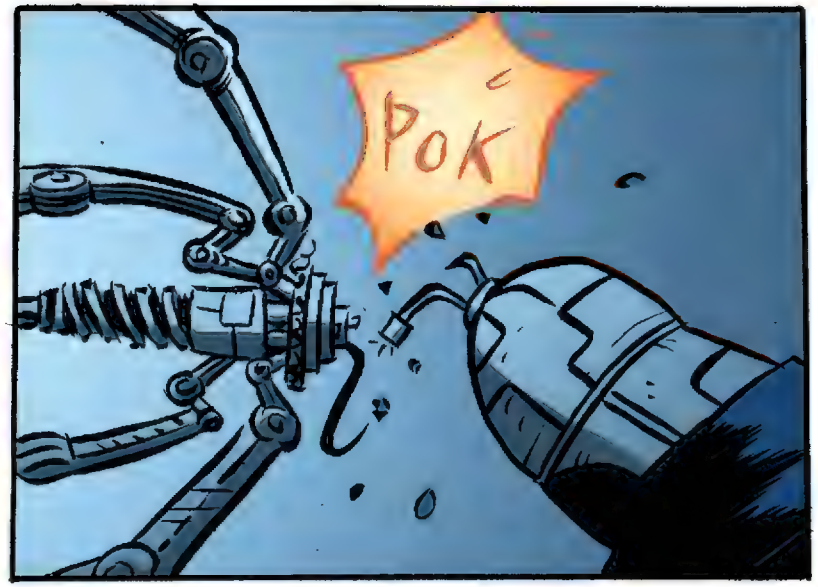

OH. OW. WHAT THE...?
WHAT IS IT? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?


WRRRRRRRRRRRZZZZZZZZZ!

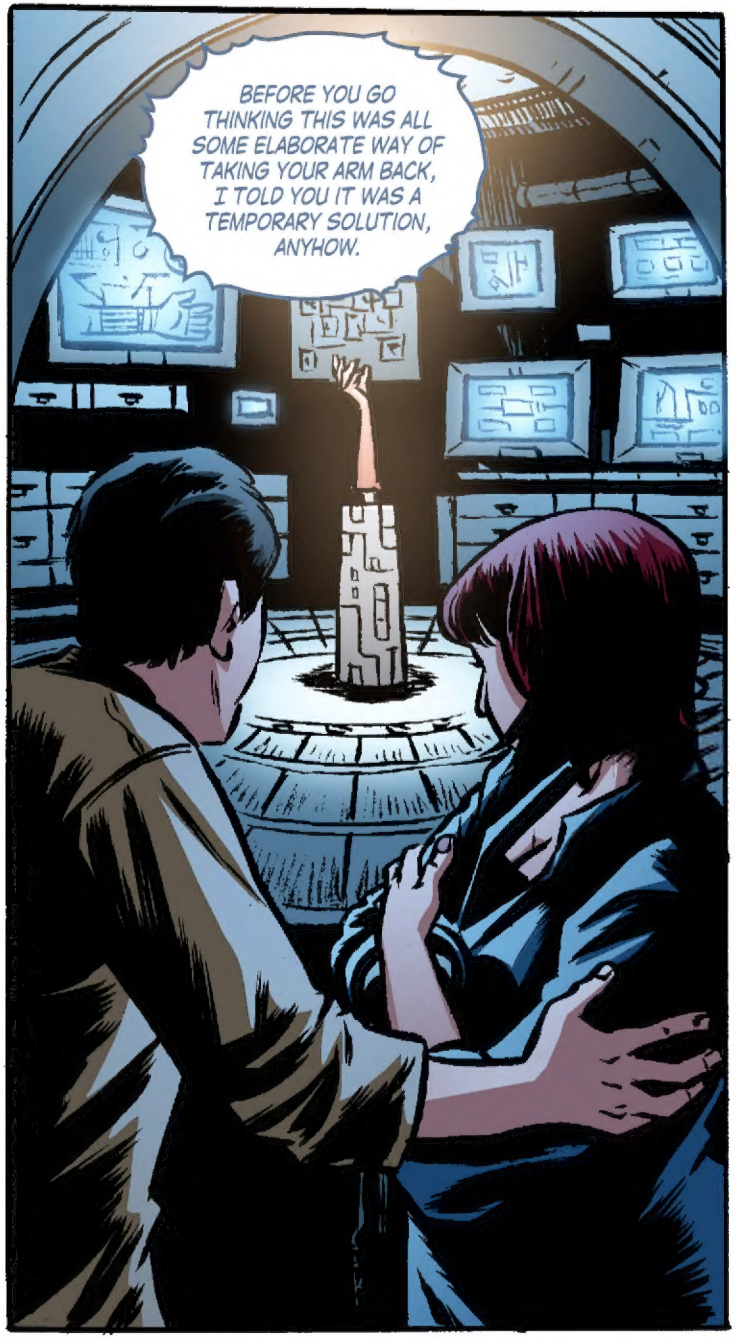
ARE YOU SEEING THIS? WHAT THE HELL...?
YOU MADE CONTACT WITH THE SEAL. IT MUST HAVE TRIGG--

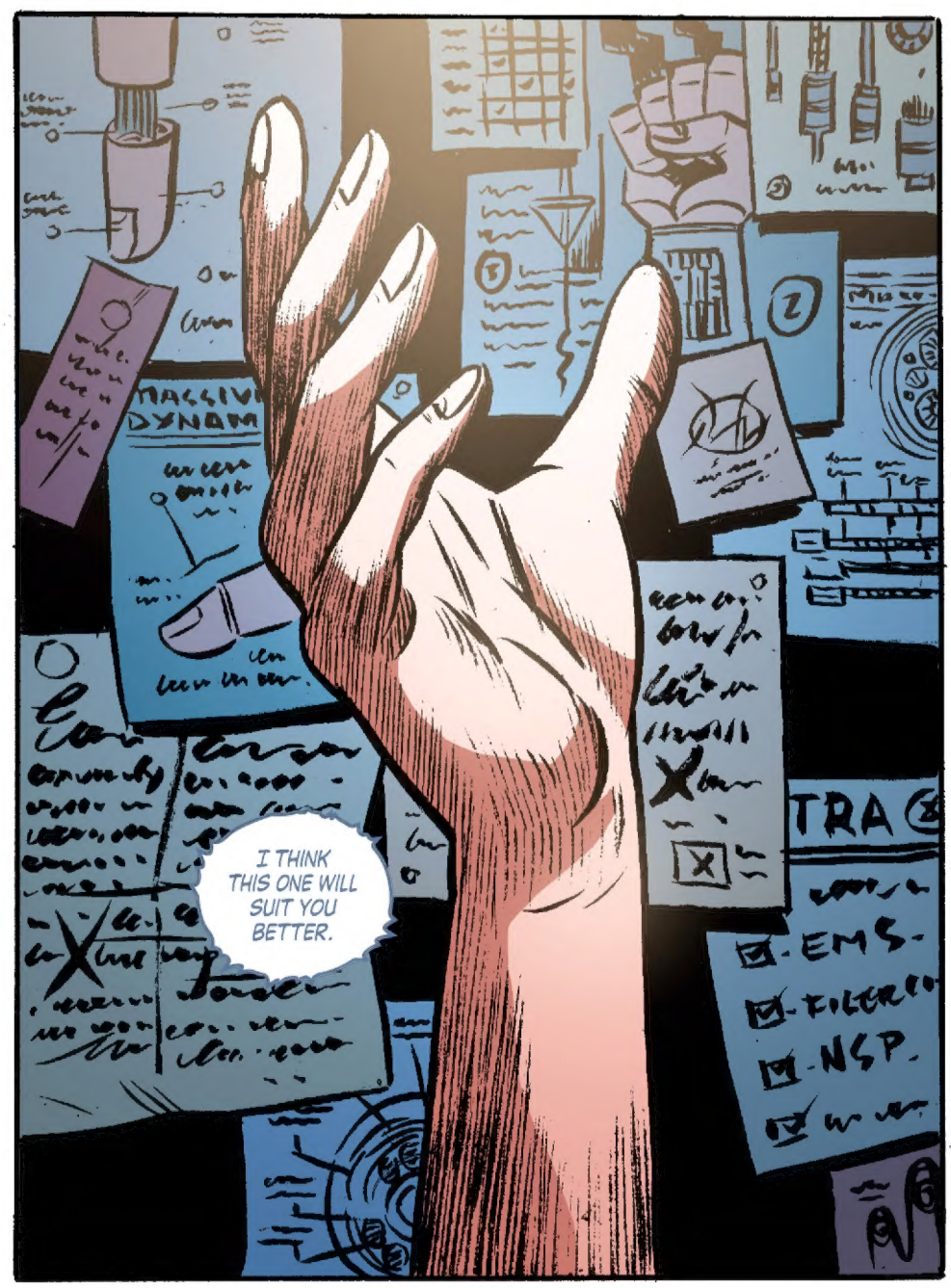
FANTASTIC! AND HORRIBLE, I'M SURE, BUT LOOK AT THE SHAPE! REMIND YOU OF ANYTHING?
REMINDS ME OF WHAT A STRANGE PERSON WILLIAM SOMETIMES WAS, IS WHAT IT REMINDS ME OF.
YES, BUT I MEANT THE SHAPE OF THE INDENTAT--
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN, WALTER! I'M THE ONE WHOSE ARM JUST REFORMED ITSELF INTO A NONE-TOO-SUBTLE CLUE!
CHIK


WHAT... WAIT! NO!

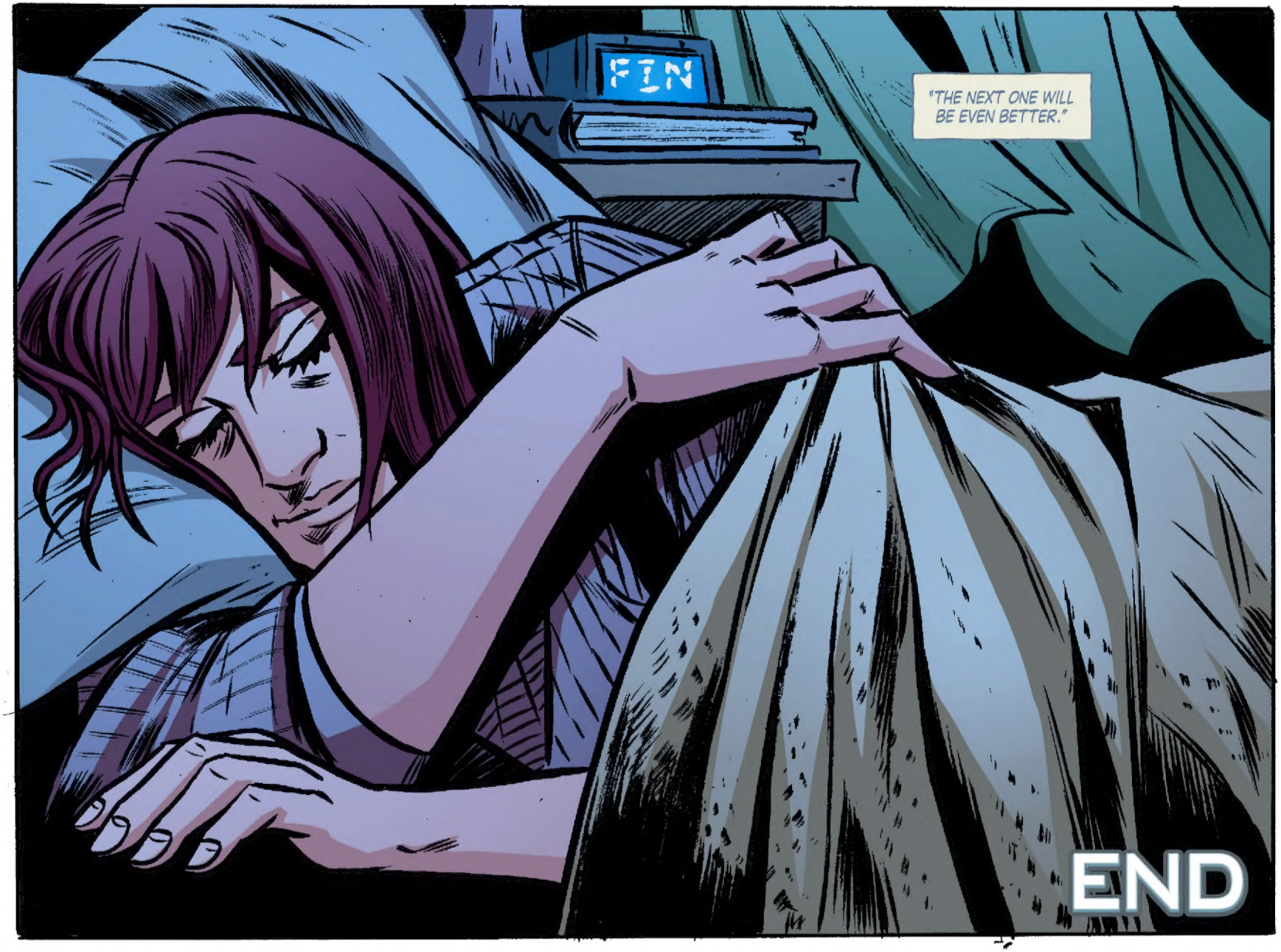

POK

EXCUSE THE THEATRICS, NINA. I COULDN'T HELP MYSELF, AND I DIDN'T KNOW IF I WOULD BE AROUND FOR THIS, SO I GAVE IN TO A CERTAIN SENSE OF THE DRAMATIC.
A RECORDING.


BEFORE YOU GO THINKING THIS WAS ALL SOME ELABORATE WAY OF TAKING YOUR ARM BACK, I TOLD YOU IT WAS A TEMPORARY SOLUTION, ANYHOW.


I THINK THIS ONE WILL SUIT YOU BETTER.

OH... WILLIAM.
IT'S BEEN IN HERE, BUILDING ITSELF, FOR THE MOST PART. SORRY IF IT TOOK TOO LONG. FOR WHATEVER REASON, I'M NOT AROUND TO SEE YOUR FACE, AND FOR THAT I'M SORRY, ESPECIALLY IF I'M DEAD.
BUT TRUST ME...


FIN
"THE NEXT ONE WILL BE EVEN BETTER."
END

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